

CONTRIBUTING FACTOR THAT CAN CAUSE CHILDREN TO START SMOKING

Cigarette smoking, as it exists in the world today, is a most remarkable phenomenon. It is a habit of the most widespread proportions, and a product of the twentieth century. Smoking has been regarded as a disease with serious implication on the health of individuals, especially to non-smokers, a country's health system and economic well-being. It is one habit that is commonly found in men, women, children, elderly, the rich and the poor. In Malaysia, statistics show that every day about 50 teenagers below the age of 18 start smoking and most of them become hardcore smokers. According to a recent World Health Organization report, more than 100,000 youths started smoking daily. There are several factors that can influence to start smoking.

One of the contributing factor that could cause children to start smoking is the family itself because they become bad examples or role models to children and lack of parental involvement in their children lives from the start. As we know, children are easily influenced by adults and they are also full of curiosity at such young age. It cannot be help since it is their nature which help them to grow and learn things but it could also lead to bad thing if left unguided. Hence, adult smokers in a family set a bad role model for their children because it is a sign of psychological motivation or encouragement to their children and also a message that it is a grown up thing to do. In the end, they tend to follow their parents or family member behaviors as a lifestyle. An example of adult smokers can be their own parents, siblings or close relatives. Therefore, it is crucial for parents to be more involved and restrictive in their bad behaviors in front of their children. Beside showing bad role model, the lack of involvement from parents should be emphasize because children who are engaged with people who smoke if left unmonitored will turn out to be smokers. We al aware that during that age, children have no knowledge of the effects or consequences of smoking because at that time they were influence by others due to peer pressure just to fit in with the crowd or maybe they like to try it as an act of rebellion. therefore, parental involvement in monitoring their childrens behaviors as an adult to guide and alert them about the harmful effects of smoking could help children to overcome peer pressure.

Another factor that can contribute people to start smoking is the media. Media is a tool of communication that can influence people especially children and youth. Now days, media is seen as a new religion where media control the way we think, act and the way we present ourselves in a physical and mental form which "media as a way of life". As a result children become obsessed with having what they see on television or movie. Movie or television have become a seductive come on for the tobacco industry where child tend to mimics from it. Today, can be seen there are many advertisements related to smoking in electronic media, especially the internet. Various type of advertisement that advertised by tobacco companies to popularize their products. This is normal where the human instinct has a desire to try what they see. They start to join in the smoking habit. Although at first they just want to try, but eventually they will be addicted to the enjoyment of smoking. An example of bad advertisement is when smoking can reduce body weight for women as

the nicotine contained in cigarettes can increase the rate of burning calories in the body. Following this belief, some women who are concerned about their appearances can be susceptible to smoking. Other than that, media shows celebrities smoking had a bad influence to children where children will parrot what they see and what they perceive as an adult behavior. Children develop “cognitive scripts” that guide their own behavior by imitating the action of media heroes.

There is a famous phrase, that is “curiosity kill the cat”. Children come into the world eager to learn, motivated and curious and this is actually a good thing. It is their nature to experiment and learn new things but curiosity could also lead to bad things. Therefore, it is important as parent to support and guide them to channel their curiosity to something good because if they are left unobserved and unsupervised, children could be involved in smoking. Children cannot justify yet from what is right and what is wrong so they believe what appeared on television or movie is right. Hence, as parents and adult we need to behave and show good examples to children so that they will grow up to be good and successful adults. This responsibility does not fall on to parents only but also to the society at large.